

## Chapter 6

# Educators and Wellbeing: The Role of Mindfulness in the Times of Technology

**Plamen Miltenoff**

*St. Cloud State University, USA*

**Kelsey Milne**

*St. Cloud State University, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*In a growing world of technology, stress and burnout increase. The surge of depression and anxiety among the young generations with their smart devices and the new reality of social media is a clear sign for the need to restore ancient practices of contemplative exercises and meditation. The authors of this chapter assert the pivotal role of educators as role models in the process of fending stress and affirming wellbeing by introducing and fostering these practices in educational institutions. A mixed method research confirms findings in the literature regarding the importance for both teachers and students to learn to regulate and control their emotions in the classroom and develop effective coping strategies to alleviate the high degree of burnout among teachers.*

### INTRODUCTION

In a recent discussion at the Future Trends Forum (<https://bryanalexander.org/the-future-trends-forum/>), Dr. Lee Keays, the former executive director of the Counseling Center at the University of Alabama, referred to the recently published “Stress in America” Press Room (<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/>) and emphasized the steady increase of stress in the life of Americans. Dr. Keays also underlined the difference between generations’ experiences of stress.

This chapter addresses the central role of the teacher in a complex structure fostering understanding and habits for educators and their students in times of increasing technology-related stress. As per Danish research (Tromholt, 2016), abandoning social media improves two dimensions of wellbeing: life satisfaction and positive emotions. In 2013, The Centers for Behavioral and Preventive Medicine

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(CBPM) published research establishing a clear connection between social media use and declining academic performance (Carter, 2013). It seems as if social media in particular, and technology in general, contribute to the tumultuous life of the young generation. Yet, more current observations suggest a quick adaptation of Generation Z to the peculiarities of social media and technology (Quaraishi, 2019).

Wellbeing includes methods and practices for restoring balance in such turbulent times, but also toward understanding the environment and the causes of such imbalance. Adaption to the new times of technology and social media is evolving very much as social media and technology themselves evolve.

Sherry Turkle's "disconnect" has followers, (e.g. Kushlev, 2018; Price, 2018), who seek to impose a distance between teenagers in particular and users in general, and their electronic gadgets, as an approach to restoration of well-being. Barbezat & Bush, (2013) Pang, (2011) and Levy, (2016) are some, among many, who address wellbeing through contemplative techniques and practices.

Mindful practices and contemplative methods are increasingly popular across generations as natural responses to stress, generated to a great degree by burgeoning technologies. Yoga is on the rise in the last twenty years across the Western Hemisphere (Jimenez, 2019), but so are depression and suicide rates among students (O'Donnell & Saker, 2018)). The wellbeing of students cannot be achieved and/or preserved in a vacuum. Societal elements, often complex and shaped by numerous variables and factors, become determining. The wellbeing of younger generations depends on their immediate surroundings, including parents, teachers, friends, and the society as a whole.

## **REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE**

The review of the literature for this chapter faced this complex structure of surroundings, factors, and topical issues. We lack an overarching search term, e.g., stress, burnout, depression, tension, anxiety; all are terms related to the topic at hand. Mindfulness, wellbeing, meditative and contemplative practices/activities, are also related to the topic. Chiesa & Malinowski, (2011) noted "mindfulness" and "meditation" as two words often used for multiple processes, making a true meaning difficult to capture with a single definition. In addition, although closely related, the literature habitually treats instructors' approaches toward students as a separate arena.

The rapidly increasing and ubiquitous presence of technology, particularly social media, is viewed by many as the foremost cause for burnout, stress, anxiety, etc. Bailey (2018) considers the disruption through technology in education as dangerous for children. However, McMullan, (2018) argues the positive correlation of moderate technology use to positive mental health, as per Przybylski & Weinstein, (2017).

Will (2017) reports educators' stress level higher than the rest of the population, and Harper (2019) offers both teachers and educational leaders strategies to improve teachers' mental health. In Spain, analogous endeavors are underway to address the technology addiction (Menárguez, 2019). The proliferation of social media is opening teachers to stress escalation; United Kingdom media reports "schools often gave the impression that teachers were available to parents – and their own managers – 24 hours a day" (Adams, 2019, p. ?).

Parallel to the increase of stress and burnout, efforts to alleviate their impact also intensify. CNN (2016) reports on the increasing acceptance of such practices at schools across the United States. Similarly, George Lucas', non-profit *Edutopia* organization also draws attention to the benefit for students of mindfulness activities (Edutopia, 2019). Desautels (2019) promotes further Edutopia's perspective on the connection between mindful practices and brain preparedness for learning. Kosal (2019) touches

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